



BLIND SWEEPS AND SMART RAIDS

Law enforcement raids are most effective when they involve good information gathering and planning, and that is certainly the case in fighting modern slavery. While it is unrealistic to expect every intervention will have complete information, learning enough to know with a high degree of certainty that trafficking victims are present in labor and commercial sex sites is important before mounting an operation. Victim information is usually obtained through the accounts of escaped or rescued victims, by law enforcement agents working undercover or through strategically recruited informants.

“Smart” raids can free trafficking victims while minimizing harm to others. They are based on real evidence, have a well-defined goal grounded in law, and are planned to ensure the safety of everyone involved. They should include arrangements to segregate supervisors, to conduct victim-centered interviews, to cross-reference victims’ accounts, and to quickly transition to post-rescue care and shelter for identified victims.

On the other hand, some raids are “blind”: they are executed against a target without adequate prior attempts to verify the existence of trafficking victims in those locations. They are based on assumptions, or are simply round-ups meant to clean out a red light district. They often do not have a legal theory or any evidentiary basis driving them, and do not include victim identification processes. Blind raids can lead to poor results while harming those not involved in human trafficking.

Officers often become disheartened after such unsuccessful raids, especially if they naively assumed exploited people would be found enthusiastically awaiting liberation. Bad experiences with blind raids can lead to less effort to actually find and raid sites where labor or sex trafficking is continuing, or can lead to cynicism in government and civil society regarding even the existence of human trafficking as a crime phenomenon.

Identifying Victims Of Trafficking

The violence – physical and psychological – and intimidation marking involuntary servitude means victims are often reluctant to identify themselves as victims. This is true around the world and occurs for various reasons. Victims are usually taught to fear law enforcement authorities and NGOs. If victims are underage, they are often typically coerced by traffickers and brothel keepers to claim they are adults consensually involved in prostitution. Adult trafficking victims may have been threatened to keep them from revealing any indicators of trafficking such as involuntary confinement, debt bondage, or threats of violence against them and their families. Labor managers and brothel keepers often threaten victims or their relatives with future harm if they tell the truth to authorities.

Suspected victims must be removed from the site of exploitation – a threatening environment – and taken to a safe place. Bosses and guards should be identified and segregated, lest they threaten the victims or chill them by their mere presence. The state needs to have temporary custody of these suspected victims and view them as victims or witnesses of serious crimes. In a place where they can be interviewed in



Enrico Dagnino

a non-confrontational setting, victims of human trafficking are more likely to reveal at least a portion of their true situations. The true ages of victims can be learned through self-reporting or consensual medical examinations. Police and social counselors need time to interview and counsel suspected victims. This counseling period, ranging from a few days to two weeks, should become a standard practice in countries with significant trafficking problems.

Once a person's status as a victim of trafficking has been determined, the opportunity for long-term care can be offered to facilitate rehabilitation, though victims should not be pressured to accept such assistance.

Children Used For Commercial Sex

U.S. government policy on children (under the age of 18) used for commercial sex is unambiguous: they must be removed from exploitation as soon as they are found. The use of children in the commercial sex trade is prohibited under both U.S. and international law. There can be no exceptions, no cultural or socio-economic rationalizations to prevent the rescue of children from sexual servitude.

Ngo Involvement

NGOs often help law enforcement officers carry out raids and rescues. They can offer psychosocial counseling skills to help identify trafficking victims, usually after they are removed from trafficking situations.

NGOs and media representatives can also play a valuable role in holding law enforcement authorities to legal standards of crime prevention and victim care by bearing witness demanding accountability. NGOs, however, should not play a lead role in a raid or rescue, as they lack authority to perform law enforcement actions and could easily be caught in a cross-fire. NGOs and the media should avoid any practices harmful to the rights of children or others. While it may be attractive as a public relations tool, including broadcast media in counter-trafficking raids, it is an invasion of victims' privacy and puts them at risk.



Pete Gibson/Empathize

At the doors of a brothel in Cambodia that has been shut down, tiny sandals provide a reminder of the youngest victims exploited there.